



The Winter Count: Marking Time — Grades: K-3

Summary:

Students will view a PowerPoint about a Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) winter count, learning what winter counts were, how the Yanktonais used pictorial symbols, and how they decided what to record. Then students will work in small groups to create a communal timeline that they will record winter-count style.

This lesson is aligned with the OPI Indian Education for All (IEFA), “Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians” (EUs), particularly:

- EU 1–Tribal Diversity
- EU 2–Individual Diversity
- EU 3–Beliefs, Spirituality, Traditions, Oral History Persist
- EU 4–Reservations–land reserved
- EU 5–Federal Indian Policy
- EU 6–History from Indian Perspectives

This lesson is also aligned with the following Montana Art Content Standards:

- Arts Content Standard 1: Students create, perform/exhibit, and respond in the Arts.
- Arts Content Standard 2: Students apply and describe the concepts, structures, and processes in the Arts.
- Arts Content Standard 3: Students develop and refine arts skills and techniques to express ideas, pose and solve problems, and discover meaning.
- Arts Content Standard 5: Students understand the role of the Arts in society, diverse cultures, and historical periods.
- Arts Content Standard 6: Students make connections among the Arts, other subject areas, life, and work.

Essential questions students will answer throughout the lesson:

- What is oral history?
- Who are the Plains tribes?
- What are some ways the Plains tribes told time?
- How do we tell time today?
- How did Montana Indian tribes keep and tell their stories and histories? How do we today?
- How did some Plains Indian tribes record important events?
- How do we record time today?
- Which Montana tribes share the land of their reservation? Where did they live before?
- Why isn't the Salish tribe a Plains Indian tribe?
- What is a symbol? What are some symbols used in the Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) winter count? What do they mean? Can I recognize the event by looking at the symbol? What are some symbols we use today?
- What major event has changed my life in some way?

About this Lesson

Marina Weatherly, an artist and art educator from Stevensville, Montana, developed this activity in 2012. It was reviewed by the Indian Education Division of the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI). Funding for this project was provided through a partnership between the Montana Historical Society and OPI.

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Activity 1: Learning about Winter Counts and the Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux)

Materials:

- Tribal Homeland, 1855 Map and (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>)
- Current Montana Reservations Map (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>)
- “Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) Winter Count” PowerPoint and lesson plan (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>)
- Paper and pencils for brainstorming

Preparation:

Instructors should familiarize themselves with the material on “The Art of Storytelling” website (<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/PictographicArt>). Print out the PowerPoint script and preview the PowerPoint.

Procedure:

Introduce the activity by presenting the learning objectives to the students.

- Art is like a window into cultures and history, and looking at art can tell us something about the people who made the art and help us to appreciate and respect other people.
- We will be looking at a winter count robe—a type of calendar—made by the Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux). By looking at maps first, we will learn where some tribes, including the Sioux, lived a long time ago and how they lived. We will also locate a few present-day Montana Indian tribes and reservations on another map.
- The winter count robe will tell us how the Yanktonai thought about time and how they told time. By talking about the materials used for the winter count, you will learn about how close to nature the Dakota (Sioux) tribes were in the old days. Looking at the winter count will also help us understand how the Yanktonais kept track of important events, using picture writing or symbols that meant something.

- We will also talk about how we tell and keep track of events in time today. Then, you will choose key events in your lives or history and create a timeline and your own individual and/or group winter count that records key events using your own symbols. You will show the winter count to the class and we will talk about it.

Show the Tribal Homelands Map. Describe the Plains Indian homelands and lifeways of the old days. Emphasize their use of the natural world for survival by hunting and gathering. Tribes moved around, following the animals and plants, according to the change of seasons. Locate and show the ancestral homelands of a few Montana tribes, including a tribe whose ancestral homeland or reservation is located nearest your community. Locate the Dakota (Sioux) and explain that they have a reservation in Montana today. Explain that there were many events and changes that happened to the tribes over time. Ask students to find a Montana Indian tribe and its homeland on the map.

Show Current Montana Reservations Map. Explain that many new people (to the U.S.) were coming into the West during the 1800s, and this changed the old way of life of the Plains Indian tribes. They were no longer free to travel and gather resources as they once had, and so they adapted. Eventually, the tribes were placed on reservations, which is land put aside by the tribes for their own use. Locate a few local Montana tribes and reservations. Locate the Montana Dakota (Sioux) tribe and the Fort Peck Reservation.

Tell students: Each tribe is different in history, culture and language. Today, Montana Indians still live here and practice some of their traditional, cultural ways.

Discuss: How do you think life changed for Montana tribes from the old days to the present day?

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Show “Yanktonai Dakota (Sioux) Winter Count” PowerPoint. After the PowerPoint, review what you have learned about winter counts. Particularly, students should remember:

- To decide what important events to use for a certain year, the elders would get together at the end of a year and talk about all the important events that happened in the past year. They would choose one event for that year. They had to make a decision together.
- The record keeper, or artist, would draw the symbols on animal hide, and later, heavy fabric and paper. The women and girls in the tribe would scrape and tan the hides, and in this way helped the men in creating the winter count. The hide, even though it was large, was very easy to roll up for traveling. They would use animal bones or the frayed end of sticks for a paintbrush and paint colors made from plants, charcoal, and minerals (these are natural materials). The artists of this time period respected their natural materials and took care of them.
- The winter count helped people remember their histories, and today winter counts remind people who they are and where they come from. Looking at an Indian tribe’s

winter count also helps all of us understand the story of a people and their culture during a period in time when symbols told a very important story.

Discuss:

- Why is it named a winter count?
- Which tribe created this Winter Count?
- Where did they live a long time ago?
- Do they have a reservation in Montana now?
- What are different ways the Indians in Montana told time and kept track of time and important events?
- How do we tell time and record time and events today?
- What symbols do we use today for time?
- What symbols do we use for other things?
- What painting materials did the Dakota (Sioux) Indians use to paint on hides?
- What colors can you find in the winter count?
- What else in nature moves in circles or has a circle shape?

Activity 2: Creating a Personal History Timeline and a Winter Count

Materials:

For timelines:

- Sample timeline
- Small- or large-scale roll paper, depending on group size
- Black and color markers

For winter count:

- Scrap paper, pencil
- Choose one for surface: the enclosed printed hide (copied); tan paper of choice, with edges torn to resemble hide; large roll paper, with edges torn.
- Media choices: pencil, color pencil, Sharpie, markers, crayons, oil pastels

Preparation: Instructors must choose and specify:

- Time span of timeline
- Content of timeline: For personal history timeline, specify individual, family, or community. Emphasize that events may be natural or caused by people.
- Find example of a timeline to show students.

Procedure:

Tell students they will be creating a personal history timeline.

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- Ask them to think about, discuss, and identify major events that have impacted their own lives.
- On scrap paper, have each student write down a few of the events in order and create a symbol, in color, for each event and a date, if known. Give examples, such as birthdays, first day of school, family vacations, etc. K-1 grades could first brainstorm collectively with a teacher's guidance. Students will present their events and symbols to the class and discuss.
- Show the students an example of a timeline. The students will create a group timeline following the model but using their own events. The events will be identified with the date (or time), the event title (K-1: Teacher can help write in their title), and the chosen symbol for that event. The students will help place events in order, according to date.
- **Discuss:** Do the symbols look like the event? Are the events in order? Why are the events important and remembered?

Tell students they will now create a winter count timeline.

- Although you will follow the same procedure as above, the format of the end product will change.
- Students can use the same events, content, and symbols as above. Instead of a linear

timeline, however, the events will be placed spatially as in the Yanktonai winter count, with the earliest event starting in the left corner and spiraling in on a curved line.

- Have students practice this during the planning stage on scrap paper.
- Before starting the formal winter count, discuss how the materials the students have available are different from the materials the Yanktonais used. For example: "The Yanktonais used materials they had on hand to make a winter count, like hide. Instead of painting on animal hide with natural gathered materials or ink that we got through trade, we will be using paper and tools that we have on hand in our school."
- Have students choose a record keeper (vote), who will draw a spiral line that ends in the middle of the paper you are actually using for the class winter count. Make sure the record keeper leaves room for the symbols and that the symbols are equally spaced on the line. The students will each add the symbols in order, and turn the paper as they go, so the symbols are always sitting on top of the line, and some of the symbols will be upside down or sideways. Each student will take turns explaining their event(s), in order to the class. Discuss.

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Vocabulary/Glossary

Cross-Curricular Vocabulary

Adapt: To adjust to something

Cooperation: The act of working together to achieve a common goal

Communication: Activity of conveying information

Community: A group of people who live in the same area, or the area in which they live

Culture: The beliefs, customs, practices, and social behavior of a particular nation or peoples

Hide: Animal skin

History: The study of the past; a record of what happened in the past

Oral History: Histories told orally, not written

Relationship: A connection between two or more things, or the state of being related to something else

Reservation: Land reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties and agreements with the government

Traditional: A long-standing action or belief of a community or group, usually handed down from one generation to another

The Language of Art

Elements of Art used in lesson:

Line, shape, space

Pictograph: Picture writing; a pictorial sign or symbol

Symbol: Something that stands for or represents something else

Evaluation or Assessment

Students will be evaluated or assessed on their demonstration of knowledge, understandings, skills, and abilities according to both the Essential Understandings and Montana Arts Content Standards as outlined in the learning objectives. This will be based on how well the students answered the questions during the visual presentation of the winter count, the level of inquiry, and the outcome of the art activities for the timelines. If individual student journals were kept through the lessons, they could be utilized as a formative, summative, or anecdotal assessment.

The four performance levels included in the Montana Art Standards: Advanced, Proficient,

Nearing Proficiency, and Novice.

Objectives to Evaluate or Assess:

Students will know:

- Life was different for Indian tribes before the 1800s, long ago (hunting, gathering, moving with the seasons).
- Symbols are like picture words.
- Some Montana Indian tribes, like the Dakota (Sioux), used symbols to make a winter count.
- Winter counts recorded history and special events on an animal hide. There are different ways to record events (calendars, books, winter counts).

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- Student works can be collaborative to create a winter count or a personal story, using symbols.
- Basic art elements are found in the pictures from long ago and pictures from artists now.

Students will be able to:

- Create a story with symbols that tell their individual story or collective story.

Suggested Extension Activities

Read *Huckleberries, Buttercups, and Celebrations*, by Jennifer Greene and Antoine Sandoval (Arlee, MT: Npustin Press, 2011), for seasonal cycles, and other stories from Montana Indian tribes relating to the observance and marking of time, including:

- *The Crow* from the Indian Reading Series (Assiniboine): apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book13.pdf
- *Tepee, Sun, Time* from the Indian Reading Series: apps.educationnorthwest.org/indianreading/2/book14.pdf
- *How Turtle Flew South for the Winter* (Dakota Sioux) in *Keepers of the Earth*, Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997), pp. 157-163. Traditional story of Turtle's experience as an introduction for the study of conditions in the wild and adaptive strategies found among animals for surviving the cold season.